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ABSTRACT

Drawing from Mortimer J. Adler's "The Paideia Proposal" and from related publications, this paper identifies aspects of the proposal that relate to basic communication instruction. The first part of the paper summarizes "The Paideia Proposal," pointing out the major points in each of its four sections, which concern schooling the people, the essentials of public schooling, teaching methods and learning, and higher and continuing education and earning a living. The second part of the paper concentrates on points raised in the third section of the proposal, discussing the role of the teacher as lecturer, as coach, and as Socrates. The third part looks at the implications of the proposal for communication instruction, concluding that implementing the proposal in the public schools would mean (1) making formal instruction in speech communication a part of elementary as well as secondary programs; (2) including listening as a formal subject of basic instruction; (3) encouraging students to use their acquired knowledge of communication to produce speeches and writings beyond the text; (4) having students write and speak more often, and teachers listen and read more; and (5) balancing the speech curriculum. The final part of the paper discusses challenges presented to speech communication educators by the proposal. (FL)

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THE PAIDEIA PROPOSAL: IMPLICATIONS & CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION

Thomas Joseph Socha

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THE PAIDEIA PROPOSAL: IMPLICATIONS & CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION

by Thomas Joseph Socha

In response to a growing national concern for reform of American public schooling at the basic levels, Mortimer J. Adler, on behalf of a distinguished group of scholars, educators, and administrators published The Paideia Proposal.[1] In Paideia, Adler demonstrates the need for restructuring of our country's basic education system and proposes a framework for this undertaking. A subsequent publication, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, addresses questions and issues raised by educators and provides further details of the proposal.[2] A recent publication, The Paideia Program provides information about the curriculum.[3] This essay examines the Paideia Project and identifies implications and challenges of the project for basic communication education. Section one summarizes The Paideia Proposal. Section two focuses on Paideia teaching and learning methods highlighting the role of communication instruction. Lastly, section three identifies implications, challenges, and discusses the utility of Paideia for current basic communication instruction.

The Proposal

The Paideia Proposal is divided into four major sections. Section one, "The schooling of a people," argues that a democracy such as ours has the responsibility to educate all its members for participation. Currently this is accomplished by mandatory schooling for a period of twelve years. However, Adler points out qualitative differences in this education which contribute to educational class differences. To amend this, Adler proposes a unified system of basic schooling. "Basic schooling-the schooling compulsory for all--must do something other than prepare some young people for more schooling at advanced levels. It must prepare all of them for the continuation of learning in adult life, during the working years and beyond."[4]

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Section two, "The essentials of basic schooling," focuses on the objectives of basic schooling and the means by which these objectives are to be realized. The objectives of basic schooling include: preparation for adult life, adequate preparation for the duties of citizenship, and the acquisition of skills common to all work.[5] The means to realize these objectives comprise the Paideia framework, of which there are three components: the acquisition of organized knowledge, the development of intellectual skills, and the enlarged understanding of ideas and values. The areas of instruction include: language, literature, fine arts, mathematics, natural science, history, geography, and social studies. Intellectual skills to be developed include: reading, writing, speaking, listening, calculating, problem solving, observing, measuring, estimating, and exercising critical judgment. Finally, the means to enlarge students' understanding of ideas and values include: discussing books beyond texts, participating in art and music, as well as, in the dramatic and visual arts.[6] These three components form the framework for basic education and each is essential for complete basic schooling. "For without coaching (of intellectual skills) learners will lack the skills needed for the study of basic subject matters. Without discussion, they may become memory machines able to pass quizzes or examinations. But probe their minds and you will find that what they know by memory they do not understand."[7] Paideia schooling begins as early as grade one and continues through grade twelve. There are no electives except for the choice of a foreign language. Physical education is also a requirement.

Section three, "Methods of teaching and learning," will be summarized and discussed in the next section of this essay. Finally, section four, "Beyond basic schooling," focuses on earning a living, higher education, and continued education in light of The Paideia Proposal. Without Paideia, Adler contends, "universities will continue to be crippled by inadequately prepared students and people outside the university will remain unchallenged, earning a living, but not living well."[8]

Teaching and Learning

Section three of The Paideia Proposal, "Methods of teaching and learning," focuses on three instructional methods. First, students acquire organized knowledge by means of didactic instruction or lecturing. Second,

students acquire intellectual skills by means of coaching. And third, students' understanding and appreciation for ideas and values are increased by means of maieutic instruction; more commonly known as socratic questioning. Each of these methods is discussed in detail below, highlighting communication instruction.

Teacher as Lecturer

An efficient but overused method to impart information is the lecture. It is efficient in so far as the instructor can prepare a lesson in advance and present it to a large body of students in a "one shot" effort. The lecture can then be archived for a future class. For Adler, the purpose of lecturing is to help the students by "telling, explaining, pointing out difficulties to be overcome, problems to be solved, and conclusions to be learned."[9] Adler qualifies this by stating, "However, to keep this sort of teaching from becoming no more than a temporary stuffing of memory, the telling should be tempered by questioning--back and forth across the teacher's desk. The more there is questioning and discussion, the more enlivened the class hour and the better the understanding of the subject taught."[10]

In a Paideia school each of the aforementioned subjects, i.e. language, literature, etc. comprise organized bodies of knowledge to be didactically taught. Language, for example, "comprises learning grammar, syntax, the forms of discourse, and to some extent the history of our own language. Comparisons between English and other languages being studied in the program should be stressed. Whether mathematics is also a language such as English should be considered."[11] The jist of this component is to teach students about the various subjects. With respect to communication, students are taught about communication processes and about language. The Paideia Program provides details with respect to curriculum.

Assessment of the acquisition of organized knowledge can be done using traditional pencil and paper measures such as tests and quizzes. Adler feels that these measures are sufficient for this purpose.

Teacher as Coach

To develop such intellectual skills as, for example, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical judgment, a method best suited is coaching.[12] Paideia educational goals with respect to these intellectual skills include: "showing an understanding of a moderately complicated essay, demonstrating an ability to write clear and concise expository prose. . ., sorting out issues. . ., thinking through an argument, evaluating it, formulating a persuasive argument and delivering it orally, and listening critically to a speech and responding relevantly to it."[13] These goals cannot be realized by means of didactic instruction "since what is learned here is skill in performance, not knowledge of facts and formulas. It cannot consist in the teacher telling, demonstrating or lecturing. Instead it must be akin to the coaching that is done to impart athletic skills."[14]

As a coach, the teacher becomes a facilitator of preferred performance. The teacher as coach "trains by helping the learner to do, to go through the right motions, to organize a sequence of acts, in a correct fashion. . . only in this way can skill in reading, writing, speaking, and listening be acquired."[15] Adler argues that the absence of coaching and drilling "accounts for the present deficiencies of many high school graduates in reading, writing, computing, and following directions."[16]

Assessment of skill in performance takes that form of what I will label as "expert feedback." For Adler, "writing needs to be taught and tested by those teachers who can write well."[17] Just as a football lineperson's effectiveness can be assessed and possibly increased by focused substantive commentary from the sideline coach; the speaker's effectiveness can be assessed and increased by focused substantive commentary from the classroom speech teacher. In Paideia tutorial work is incorporated into the curriculum for the assistance and enrichment of skills.

Integrating coaching sessions into what seems to be an already overburdened curriculum, as well as tutorial work, necessitated expanding the Paideia school day to eight hours from the current six. Teachers, by necessity would read and respond to greater amounts of student writings and

performances. Performance levels are of course assumed to be adjusted to grade and levels of ability.

Teacher as Socrate

The goal of the third and final component is to enlarge student understanding of ideas and values. The method of teaching and learning best suited for realizing this goal is the socratic method. For Adler, "It must be the maieutic or socratic mode of teaching, a mode of teaching called, 'maieutic' because it helps the student to bring ideas to birth. It is teaching by asking questions, by leading discussions, by helping to raise student's minds up from a state of understanding and appreciating less to a state of understanding and appreciating more."[18]

Discussion draws on intellectual skills and acquired organized knowledge. Discussion also teaches analysis through what Adler labels as "disciplined conversation."[19] Discussions focus on books, speeches, articles, etc., as well as, interpretations of plays, films, and music. The teacher, as did Socrates, probes with many questions designed not only to assess care in reading or listening, but to bring forth identification and analysis of the values portrayed by the work. Adler feels that this is the least used mode of teaching and learning, but is the most useful mode in terms of motivating students.

The next section of this essay will look at what this proposal means for communication instruction at the basic levels.

Implications and Challenges

The Paideia Proposal has some important implications and challenges for basic communication instruction, as well as, utility for all levels of communication education. First, the potential impact of the proposal on communication instruction will be discussed. Second, the challenges will be identified. Lastly, the utility of the proposal will be examined.

Impact

There is evidence which suggests that Paideia is receiving national attention in terms of testing, evaluation, and pilot programs. Paideia is being pilot

tested in Chicago and Atlanta.[20] The Skyline High School in Oakland California implemented the program in 1981. After two years with the program students are enthusiastic. According to the principal, "To say that The Paideia Proposal has proved successful is an understatement. The students' enthusiasm and awakening to learning which results from the opportunity to participate actively in their own learning is overwhelming."[21]

What does implementing Paideia mean for current instruction in communication? First, primary, intermediate, as well as high school curricula would include formal instruction in speech communication. It would not mean that a "communication teacher" would replace an "English teacher" or "speech teacher," but that basic education curricula would provide for instruction in both. Due to a departmentalized curriculum, high schools and many junior high schools would find adding speech instruction relatively easy. Many high schools and junior high schools already have such instruction. For the primary grades, incorporating speech instruction would be more difficult, as primary classroom teachers already have little time for current subjects, let alone one more. However, by integrating speech instruction wherever possible into reading, English, etc., taking into account varying developmental levels, the task becomes less formidable.

Second, listening instruction would be included as a formal subject of basic instruction. Students would be coached in skills of active listening, critical thinking, and critical interpretation. Listening to speeches, music, and oral interpretations will be a part of the everyday classroom much moreso than it is currently.

Third, students will be encouraged to use their acquired knowledge of communication and skills to frequently engage speeches and writings beyond texts. Through discussion they will be coached and taught by example how to ask questions and defend their own points of view.

Fourth, students will write and speak more often and teachers will read and listen more often. This will take time both in class and out of class, but allowances need to be made. Having students give panel discussions may be a useful way to incorporate these skills, while making effective use of class time.

Finally, speech curriculum will be balanced and include the three modes of teaching and learning. To say a student has been "schooled in speech" that student will have been taught about speech, have participated in giving speeches, and will have critically evaluated many speeches from a variety of situations in order to appreciate and understand their ideas and values.

Challenges

Implementing Paideia presents communication scholars with some challenges. First, scholars of communication education must continue to investigate and examine speech instruction in the primary grades. The context of the primary classroom itself must be taken into account, as well as, varying cognitive and developmental levels. The Speech Communication Association has compiled competencies for speech communication across the grades, but more needs to be done with respect to curriculum development.[22]

Second, the debate over whether to teach theory or skills at the basic level is halted by Paideia. For Adler, both are necessary, as is application through discussion. Hence, it may be better to teach students to be "functionally effective communicators" rather than "skilled" or "competent."[23] For, as Spitzberg points out, "The better we understand the functions served by communication and the motives associated with those functions, the better we will be able to instruct people in recognizing such behavior and adapting accordingly."[24]

Third, current and future instruction in basic communication, primary through and including college basic courses, needs to vigilantly incorporate the three modes of teaching and learning. Teacher teaching speech methods courses also needs to instruct future teachers in the three modes. Currently, those who teach a basic communication course might ask themselves how are the three modes of teaching and learning integrated into their courses?

Fourth, listening scholarship needs to be read and formally taught to students in basic level courses. The functions of listening as well as the motivations associated with listening need to be discussed. Examples of works to consult on listening are: Wolvin and Coakely's, "Listening Instruction;" Geeting and Geeting's, How to Listen Assertively; and Adler's, How to Speak How to Listen.[25]

Fifth, and last, educators, especially at the basic levels, might spend more time reflecting how the course she or he teaches fits into the overall goal of adequately preparing students for adulthood.

Utility

Curriculum-wise Paideia provides little that is new for communication educators. Method-wise Paideia provides a framework for assisting us in organizing basic instruction. Rhetorically, Paideia argues for formal speech instruction at grade levels where, at present, it is not taught. Lastly, Paideia clearly highlights the importance of speech communication in everyday adult life. It serves to remind us that instruction in speech communication is the right of every American and as speech communication educators it is our responsibility to assist in providing that education.

Notes

[1] Mortimer, J. Adler, The Paideia Proposal (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

[2] Mortimer, J. Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities (New York: Macmillan, 1983).

[3] Mortimer, J. Adler, The Paideia Program (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

[4] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, pp. 10-11.

[5] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 17.

[6] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 23.

[7] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 32.

[8] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 75.

[9] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 51.

[10] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 51-52.

[11] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 24.

[12] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 27.

[13] Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, p. 51.

[14] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 27.

[15] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 27.

[16] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 27-28.

[17] Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, p. 52.

[18] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 29.

[19] Adler, The Paideia Proposal, p. 30.

[20] Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, pp. 91-104.

[21] Adler, Paideia Problems and Possibilities, p. 108.

[22] Don Boileau, "Speech Communication Association Guidelines: Essential speaking and listening skills for elementary school students," available from: SCA, 5105 Backlick Rd. Suite E., Annandale, VA. 22003.

[23] B. Spitzberg, "Communication Competence as Knowledge, Skill, and Impression," Communication Education, 32 (1983), p. 323.

[24] B. Spitzberg, p. 328.

[25] A. Wolvin and C. Coakley, Listening Instruction, (Urbana, IL.: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1979); B. Geeting and C. Geeting, How to Listen Assertively (New York: Sovereign Books, 1976); Mortimer J. Adler, How to Speak How to Listen (New York: Macmillan, 1983).

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Wolvin, A., and Coakley, C. Listening Instruction. Urbana, IL.: ERIC Clearing House. 1979.